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FROM: Kika de la Garza

WASHINGTON; D C -- A unique form of self-help housing for low income rural families is available through a loan program of the Farmers Home Administration. Self-help housing, as authorized by Congress, enables individual houses to be built under supervision by a group of families who will live in the dwellings. It is simply a group do-it-yourself plan, but with the guidance of a construction expert.

Any group of from six to ten low-income rural families or low-income urban families employed in a rural area may qualify provided they cannot build modest homes by customary methods. Each family must be able to repay a loan for the cash cost of the house built by the self-help method. Loan applications are accepted by the Farmers Home Administration on an individual basis from each family participating in the program. Loans are used to buy material and to pay for any skilled labor and contract costs for work the families are unable to perform.

Each member of a self-help plan must agree to work in a group under the guidance of a construction supervisor, to work the required hours necessary to complete the house, to attend all preconstruction meetings, to build only minimum adequate housing, and to carry out all the responsibilities of home ownership after building is completed. The FHA will help out with expert advice as well as loans to qualified families. Further information is available from FHA county supervisors.

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CADPIN -- The initials stand for the new Customs Automated Data Processing Intelligence Network, about which I requested and now have received information from the Commissioner of Customs.

The system, which is designed to cope with the flow of narcotics into the United States, is now in effect along the entire U S-Mexican border, from Brownsville to San Ysidro, Cal. Like so many other facets of modern life, CADPIN depends heavily upon computers. The system contains a record of known smugglers. A Customs officer needing information can transmit a name, and within seconds receive a definite reply as to whether that name is on the list. When a smuggler is caught, the information on the case can be immediately fed into the computer, to be available if and when it may be needed in the future.

The network is also helpful in the case of an anticipated smuggling attempt, the Commissioner of Customs said. Information can be relayed to other border ports by way of the computer in 12 seconds, alerting the officers at that point about the smuggling operations.

The Bureau of Customs budget for the coming year includes funds to extend CADPIN coverage to the Canadian border and to major airports throughout the country.

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BETTER MAIL SERVICE? -- Everybody hopes so; there is room for improvement. The U S Postal Service says it is ready to guarantee, repeat guarantee, timely delivery of mail. Postmaster General Blount has informed Congress that the first measurable assurances for mail service will be instituted April 22. Affected will be zip-coded air mail posted by 4pm in 500 major cities. With 95% reliability, the Post Service pledges next-day delivery of such mail to most points within 600 miles, and the day after that to points beyond 600 miles.

Over the years postal officials have declared that mail service is better than the experiences of most of us have led us to believe. But this is the first time that a public commitment has been made to measurable performance standards.

It's going to cost more. The airmail rate is scheduled to go up next month from 10 cents to 11 cents, with first class going up from 6 to 8 cents. These rates have been announced as "temporary," which means not that they will be lowered in the future but that they will remain in effect while bigger increases are being considered.

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ZIP -- You may have noted that in the item above it was specified that the guaranteed mail must be zip-coded. The Postal Service is emphasizing this requirement. Your local telephone directory offers a guide for finding out ZIP codes for any address in the United States. In both the white pages under "U S Government" or "ZIP Code" and the yellow pages of most directories, information is provided on a variety of postal services. Numbers are listed which may be called to obtain ZIP codes.

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ONE MAIL SERVICE SUGGESTION -- A wise and experienced member of the Texas Congressional Delegation has suggested that since everybody is so tired of the war in Viet Nam it might be turned over to those in charge of the Postal System. "They might not win the war," he said, "but they would sure slow it down." All in all though we must at least say that they try since one shouldn't always bring out the negative. I should report to you that I got my car license tags by mail from Edinburg. They were mailed late in the afternoon and were in my office on the second mail delivery at mid-morning the next day.

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VISITORS -- Visiting my office this week were Hidalgo County Commissioner Herb Pike of Weslaco; Mr Rolando Cantu of Edinburg; Hidalgo County Judge Ed Gomez of McAllen; Mrs Eva Murphy of New Carrollton, Maryland, formerly of Edinburg; and Mr and Mrs Donnie Thompson of Harlingen.

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